

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



JOE ARESIMOWICZ
HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER

Senator Hartley, Representative Perone, and Members of the Commerce Committee. I am Representative Joe Aresimowicz of the 30th District serving Berlin and Southington. I want to thank you for raising HB 5423: An Act Encouraging Middle School and High School Students to Consider Careers in Manufacturing.

This legislation, which I have been proud to work on with the esteemed Minority Leader, Representative Themis Klarides, will help us strengthen our workforce development pipeline by making sure that (1) we know how many trained workers in manufacturing we need to meet the demands of businesses in the state, (2) we know how many students we have the capacity to train, and (3) we advertise these career opportunities to students in middle and early high school grades.

I have a number of manufacturers in my district and one of the requests I repeatedly hear from them is that they need more trained workers. This is not just anecdotal. Survey, after survey of manufacturers in Connecticut says that one of the biggest threats to their business is the lack of available talent. According to a 2014 survey published by the Connecticut Business and Industry Association, the majority of respondents plan to grow their businesses over the next 5 years. In fact, according to the latest numbers from the Department of Labor, we've seen a 2.1% growth in manufacturing jobs in CT over the past year, to 161,800.

At the same time, a significant number of those currently employed in manufacturing are nearing retirement. According to the state's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Plan, 47% of tool and die makers and 36% of machinists are aged 55 or over. These are high-skill jobs that require several years of hands-on training to master. All of which means, we need to double down on our efforts to recruit and train workers.

Much of today's manufacturing is no longer what it was during our childhoods. It is computer based and requires advanced training in machine operation and the ability to understand complex mathematical equations. The shops I have toured in my district are clean and safe. However, manufacturing, unfortunately, is still associated with the famous images of early 20th century factories.

Furthermore, these are good-paying positions. Hourly wages for manufacturing workers went up by 12.6% over the past year, and their weekly hours increased. These are the types of jobs we need more of: stable, middle-class, family-supporting jobs. This bill is about making sure we educate parents, guidance counselors and students about the exciting and advantageous careers in manufacturing.

This committee, the Manufacturing Caucus, and legislators on both sides of the aisle, have done a lot of work over the past several years to build and invest in workforce training programs. We have the Advanced Manufacturing Technical Centers that are under the direction of the Board of Regents, the technical high schools throughout the state, the "Dream It, Do It" campaign that CCAT organizes, programs that are run by private, independent colleges, and several others.

The program outlined under this bill looks to bring all of those entities together around the same table with manufacturers to figure out how many slots are available for students to earn the certifications and learn the skills employers need, how many more seats are needed, and to market all of these programs to our students. It is really about connecting the dots between all of the work we have done over the years. I trust that with your help we can make sure to meet the needs of employers, create new middle class jobs, and grow our state's economy.

Thank you for your consideration.